

**NESDIS Community Engagements Part 3**  
**Event Notes**  
**The Commercial Weather Data Pilot**  
**Draft Solicitation AB-133E-16-RQ-0581**

Dr. Stephen Volz, Assistant Administrator for NOAA's Satellite and Information Service

Opening Remarks

- Thank you to everyone for attending.
- Today's event is part of a continuing series of events.
- Since December -- the last time we had an event -- NOAA released its Commercial Space Policy, and NESDIS released its draft Commercial Space Activities Assessment Process (the NESDIS Process) for public comment. We received comments from some of you, and we are going through those comments now as we refine the document and prepare for final release.
- The NESDIS Process has also been informed by what we've been undertaking in the past couple months getting ready for the Commercial Weather Data Pilot (the Pilot). Just going through the exercise has informed us, and the NESDIS Process is also learning from the Pilot activity and defining what this activity should be like going forward.
- The Commercial Weather Data Pilot is underway and is why we are here today. A Request for Information (RFI) was released in May; now we have a draft Request for Quotations (RFQ) out for comment.
- The Pilot has been helpful for us in NESDIS, it has been a learning process for us. You will hear from Karen St. Germain and others about specific expertise we need to have in order to work with you as vendors, and to work within our own internal organization to take externally provided data, ingest it, and assess it.
- All of this doesn't happen just because you have a smart Principal Investigator. It happens because you have multiple people in various places. We are trying to set this up as a repeatable process, so that it is traceable and we can learn from it and not have to reinvent the wheel when we do another pilot next year or another data type in years down the road. We appreciate your forbearance as we go through this and try to improve it as we go along.
- We welcome the new director of the NESDIS Office of System Architecture and Advanced Planning (OSAAP), Dr. Karen St. Germain, who will be leading this. OSAAP has responsibility for future architectures and advanced planning, and commercial efforts are a part of this. We are finding a home for commercial activities within NESDIS; these activities are lead by OSAAP now, but won't necessarily be there forever. OSAAP is where our learning activities will take place.
- New initiatives like the Pilot start small and grow, and this is the start. You will hear from Karen and many others involved in this effort about the different elements of this effort, which is an indication of the institutionalization of this activity. This is not a one or two person activity, it is a NOAA and NESDIS activity, and we are identifying and training the expertise in our organization to carry it out.
- With that I will turn it over to Karen.

Dr. Karen St. Germain, Director, NESDIS Office of System Architecture and Advanced Planning  
Remarks

- Welcome and thank you for taking time to join in the continuation of the conversation between NESDIS and our partners.
- I relatively recently returned to NESDIS to direct OSAAP. The Pilot is one of a number of activities OSAAP is leading. What we are learning through this process will be a very important part of our planning for the future.
- Our purpose here today is to provide an opportunity to give feedback on the RFQ and to ask questions.
- Let me turn to the specifics of the Pilot.
- Pilot timeline:
  - Draft RFQ out now
  - Solicitation formally released around 1 Aug 2016
    - It will be open for a minimum of 15 days
      - This is not a lot of time, so we want to be sure you are prepared for that
  - Goal is to make an award/awards by the end of Fiscal Year 2016
  - Data collection period is from 1 October 2016 (or immediately after award) to 30 April 2017
  - Starting from award through September 2017 will be the NOAA assessment period.
    - NOAA will be doing ongoing assessment through the collection period and beyond through September 2017.
- Highlights of the draft RFQ:
  - Data requirement is at least three months of consecutive data somewhere within the collection window (1 Oct 2016-30 Apr 2017), not saying precisely when within that period.
  - We are asking for at least three consecutive months of space-based Radio Occultation data and of Precise Orbit Determination tracking data
  - We are also asking for data latency information
    - In this Pilot we're not trying to completely test data latency, but we are asking for information that will enrich our understanding of what the latency could be in an operational instantiation of a data buy.
  - We are asking that data be delivered in not larger than one month chunks to prevent a "bow wave" of data at the end of the Pilot.
  - There are some issues we are not tackling in the Pilot; data sharing with operational partners is one of them.
    - This Pilot is focused on data assessment and potential impact. We will not be sharing this data with our operational partners.
    - We will only share data with people who are part of our assessment process and they will sign appropriate non-disclosure agreements.
  - IT security is another area that we are not fully tackling as we would in an operational situation.

- Providers will not have logical access to internal IT systems. A secure FTP data transfer approach will be used to upload the data.
  - This is something we will work out as we execute with the awardee or awardees
  - There aren't special security requirements beyond the requirements associated with getting data onto our FTP server. We have a low bar for this pilot.
- In the NESDIS Process we talk about how we will approach data assessment. Per the Process, as overarching policy, we will always include specific data requirements in RFPs/RFQs.
  - In the RFQ, we include specific data requirements in Attachment 1.
  - Minimum submission requirements are included in Attachment 2.
  - We encourage any proposer to carefully review Attachment 2 to ensure your responses address every specification.
  - We encourage you not to forget the additional instructions to quoters, this is an important section as well.
- Proposal review: We will review whether offerors can meet minimum specifications
- Comment period for the draft RFQ closes on July 15
- We received a few questions in advance of this event. We will address those questions and then move to an open question and answer session.
- Disclaimer: Some questions may be taken under advisement to ensure a complete answer. Responses will be posted as an amendment/attachment to the current draft solicitation on FBO.
  - We want to be sure those who couldn't participate today can still benefit from the questions and answers.
- NOAA Subject Matter Experts present:
  - Dan St. Jean, NESDIS OSAAP
  - Kate Becker, NESDIS Office of the Chief of Staff
  - Sarah Waugh, NOAA Acquisition and Grants Office
  - Jim Yoe, National Weather Service National Centers for Environmental Prediction (NCEP)/Joint Center for Satellite Data Assimilation (JCSDA)
  - Kevin Schrab, National Weather Service Office of Observations
  - Jason Kim, Office of Space Commerce
  - Matthew Jochum, NESDIS Center for Satellite Applications and Research (STAR)
  - Doug Whiteley, NESDIS Office of Projects, Planning and Analysis

### **Question and Answer Session**

**Q:** Received in advance: The technical volume in the RFQ refers to the contractor meeting IT security standards. Exactly what standard is this referring to?

**A:** In this Pilot we are not addressing the long-term IT security questions.

- Matthew Jochum: Requirements in order to upload data as part of this Pilot:
  - "Low bar" for IT security requirements for this Pilot is correct; it is the same bar we have for our academic and NOAA partners
  - Server is hosted in STAR's DMZ.

- Data delivered via SCP, SFTP or FTP/S (FTP over SSL)
- Prospective users will have to fill out a STAR Remote Access Agreement Form and take the NOAA IT Security Awareness Course.

**Q:** Conrad Lautenbacher, GeoOptics: What do you envision the IT security standards becoming? Even if you can't say exactly, do you have an idea of what this will be?

**A:** This is still a process we are working on. We don't have answers for you today, but our approach is that we need to have a standard security posture and approach for all data coming in from commercial, international and domestic partners. We are working within NESDIS--the Office of the Chief Information Officer and our Enterprise Ground team--to develop our approach to this. We anticipate we will have more community engagements on this topic as we move along. This is not something we want to handle in an ad hoc fashion.

**Q:** Received in advance: What is the Standard Form 18 and where can it be found?

**A:** Sarah Waugh: The RFQ will be on the SF-18, right now it is on a separate form. Proposers will be able to sign the form that the RFQ is on.

**Q:** Dan Stillman, PlanetiQ: Clarifying question: previous RFI had a pre-launch simulated data component, is that activity limited to the scope of that RFI and this RFQ is solely focused on on-orbit data?

**A:** That is correct

**Q:** Conrad Lautenbacher, GeoOptics: What is the flavor of your thoughts on the assessment of the data being limited to in-house satellite folks. When would you switch to getting it in the models and checking it out from an operational perspective?

**A:** Part of this assessment will be quality assessment and impact assessment led by JCSDA

- Jim Yoe: In house in this case means the NCEP Environmental Modeling Center and NESDIS STAR elements of the JCSDA, not sharing with DoD partners. They are happy to have us doing the heavy lifting. At this stage we will be doing that assessment, which does include offline operations parallel at how the data impacts the models

**Q:** Stephen Volz, NESDIS: We currently have funding in FY16 only, do not have funding in FY17. Considering the possibility of a continuing resolution or no funding in 17, are any of these activities dependent on additional funding in FY17?

**A:** We believe we can complete this assessment based on FY16 funds, get to solid assessment of the quality of the data this year. If we get additional funds next year we could take the assessment further. This is one reason we're trying to make the award this fiscal year and make sure our partners are funded this year.

**Q:** Conrad Lautenbacher, GeoOptics: Thank you all. This is a tough task, and it is encouraging to see your progress.

**A:** We appreciate the time you invest to engage with us. This is a learning process all the way around. This is not the first time NOAA has purchased commercial data, but there is still learning that needs to happen. We appreciate your patience and engagement.

Additional questions/comments not addressed at Industry Day:

**Q:** Will companies be contacted for discussions about proposals after submission?

**A:** While formal discussions are not anticipated, offerors may be contacted to clarify any ambiguities or confirm specifications if necessary.

**Q:** Will NOAA consider including latitude range of radio occultations in the data sets received under resulting contracts?

**A:** No. For this particular pilot, NOAA's evaluation will be limited to assessing the data quality and statistical biases of the radio occultation observations.